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ABSTRACT

A preschool curriculum emphasizing the development of social behavior was implemented. Activities were designed to help the child become more aware of himself and others, develop skill in social interaction and cooperation, and develop self control and independence skills appropriate to his age level. Evaluation indicated that the program was most effective with children having lower verbal and nonverbal skills. The importance of the teacher's role in implementing the program was also noted. (ST)

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INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF PRESCHOOLERS AS A FUNCTION OF EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

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The curriculum was built around seven general goals. Activities were designed to assist the child to:

(1) Become more aware of himself and others

(2) Develop skill in dealing with the unfamiliar behavior of others

(3) Develop skill in initiating interactions with others

(4) Develop skill in responding to the interactive attempts of others

(5) Develop skill in working with others toward a mutual goal

(6) Develop the self-control necessary to allow others to continue toward their goals

(7) Develop independence appropriate to his age level.

To achieve these goals, lessons focused on four areas of the preschool program: Classroom organization and management, group activities, dyadic activities and sociodramatic play activities.

Classroom organization and management techniques were methods of planning interactions between children of differing backgrounds. Placing children in close proximity to each other by utilizing classroom routines, provided daily implementation of the curriculum.

To help the child become more aware of himself and others around him and to facilitate the initiation of interactions with different children, the child's locker space was rotated every five weeks. In this activity, locker spaces were systematically assigned and rotated according to independent variables of race, sex, and income level. A picture of each child was placed above his locker space to aid him in recognizing his locker. Children were then assigned locker spaces next to those children of a different race, sex, or income level.

Lessons helped the child to: identify his locker and talk about his picture, identify other children around him, relate to and interact with others, and helped him to use hfs locker independently. Daily use of his locker when he arrived at school and went home, provided the time necessary for the teacher to interact with the child while following procedures in the lesson. The spontaneity and flexibility in this lesson allowed for differing developmental levels as well as differing patterns of interactions.

Snack time as a part of the daily preschool routine was a group activity in which children were placed in close proximity with each other. To organize a situation that aided the child in learning to interact within mixed groups of children, a seating system was developed. The snack lesson provided a ticket system in which children received a daily ticket, printed with a color, design, or combination of both. He then found a chair at one of the four snack tables. Each week, depending on the set of tickets, each child had a choice between one or two ticketed chairs at each table.

With sixteen children in a classroom and four children at each table, tickets were given according to race, sex, or income level. For instance, Monday all low-income children received blue tickets, and all middle-income children red tickets. When all children were seated, each table had a group of two low-income and two middle-income children seated alternately.

Lessons for dyadic play were designed to achieve the goals of: helping the child to initiate and respond to others, helping the child develop the skill in dealing with the unfamiliar behavior of others, and reinforcing cooperative and sharing behavior between children having differing verbal and nonverbal patterns of behavior. To provide a play situation in which two

children received maximum reinforcement with minimum teacher guidance, a toy called a Share-A-Viewer was developed.

The toy consisted of two cushioned seats connected to a battery-operated slide viewer. Two children had to sit, and remain seated to make the viewer light, so if either child got up, the viewer would go off, but by taking turns and sharing, both children continued to cooperate and view slides such as farm animals, construction vehicles, and transportation vehicles. Reinforcement by the lighted viewer was contingent on their cooperation and tolerance of each other's behavior. By placing a white stickered dot on the correct side of the slide the children easily learned to handle the slides which were encased in a protective covering.

Lessons in sociodramatic play helped the child learn acceptable patterns of social behavior while interacting within a group of four children who were mixed according to race, sex, or income level.

To help the child learn to initiate and respond to interactions within a role playing situation, lesson units with two weeks of separate activities were built around four themes: Doctor's office, grocery store, bakery shop, and barber and hair salon. In the grocery store unit the first week of activities emphasized exploration and manipulation of the props and materials to be used in the sociodramatic play of the second week. Lead-up lessons used cereal boxes, paper milk containers, paper sacks, a cash register, and play money. These props were used in art and manipulative play activities. The exploration and manipulation of the props and materials lead the child to a higher level of play, i.e., sociodramatic play.

The careful planning of the physical play area, the selection and limitation of props and materials, and the grouping of children who played in the

activity, provided the basis for changes in the children's social behavior. The teacher's involvement was that of taking an active role in the play and reinforcing behavioral changes such as learning to borrow and share materials, or she remained outside the actual play but in the sociodramatic area for the purpose of continual reinforcement as a function of the child's behavioral direction.

Discussion

Subjective observations as well as statistical analyses indicate some interesting differences in the children's reactions to the lessons. Teachers reported that the use of photographs for locker identification, was much more effective than the use of symbols or animal pictures they had used in previous classes. The children could identify the more concrete aspect of their photo rather than a symbol such as their printed name. The activity did guide children into interactions with others with whom contact was minimal during the day. Also there were instances of close friendships occurring as a result of the locker assignment as evidenced by playmates chosen during the day.

Only one four-year-old girl and one three-year-old boy had difficulty in accepting their newly assigned locker spaces. The four-year-old insisted that her locker was elsewhere, but continued to use her new locker. The child had missed numerous days when the other children had been told about getting their new locker spaces, and thus she was not prepared for the move.

The ticket system for snack time made a noticeable impact on the children's opportunity to listen to differing experiences. The mix of children at the tables provided some interesting exchanges of conversations. For instance, while one child talked about snowmobiling and camping, another talked about

his dad and a bunch of friends sitting around, smoking a cigarette and then acting funny. Although experiences cannot be generalized to any one variable, it should be noted that varying experiences were shared as a result of the mixing of the children.

The system was also very useful in the smooth transition of children from clean-up to snack time. The incentive provided by the ticket to encourage clean-up and preparation for snack, cannot be overlooked in terms of its impact upon the children's behavior.

The reinforcement also rewarded the child's cognitive processes as his visual discriminatory skills were challenged as he looked for the matching tickets.

In the dyadic area, the Share-A-Viewer presented the children with little or no problems in learning its use. More aspects of cooperation and sharing were stimulated than was anticipated. After two or three trials with the teacher which lasted two to three minutes each, the child could understand what made the viewer light. What was not expected was the great interest and initiations taken by the child to find a friend to come with him and look at the slides. The reinforcement of the lighted viewer was powerful enough to cause the children to initiate interactions with others, to share with them. They soon learned they had to interact with and ask other children if they wanted to look at the slides.

Also, the excitement generated when one child in the dyad looked at the picture, caused the other child to become excited, which forced the second child to exhibit great amounts of self-control in waiting for his turn.

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In the sociodramatic play situations, three processes emerged as major considerations in developing activities for changing social behaviors. First, the selection and limitation of props and materials is one of the most powerful controls in structuring periods for interactions. Limitation of the materials caused a need for cooperation where there were four children and two of each of three types of play materials. Secondly, the manipulation and exploration of the props used helped the child move from manipulative play to play emphasizing the use of the prop. Thirdly, the teacher's involvement and use of recommended responses in the lesson were instrumental in guiding children through difficult social interactions, such as learning what to say when one wants to share or borrow from someone else.

This technique had the greatest effect on the children with lower verbal and nonverbal skills. Observations strongly suggest that the ability of the teacher in the lesson to move freely in and out of the play provided the most decisive method for changing children's social patterns of behavior.